

The River News

The Official Newsletter of the Delaware River Fishermen's Association

Vol. 33, No. 1

January-February 2021

Club Gearing Up For A New, Better Season; Don't Forget To Pay Your 2021 Dues

Editor's Note: *Because of the potential for scheduling to be complicated by changing COVID-19 conditions, please confirm all Club events, times, and locations on the DRFA website just prior to the day of the event.*

Members are encouraged to pass along updates to friends in the Club who do not have online access. Members without online access can also call the Tournament Hotline for updates.

This Is Your Last Newsletter Until 2021 Dues Are Paid

All DRFA members are reminded to renew their membership by paying their 2021 dues, if they have not already done so. Only registered DRFA members are allowed to participate in DRFA tournaments. The March-April newsletter will be mailed only to those who have renewed by that time.

A membership renewal form was sent to all 2020 members with an available email address. Forms are also available from the November/December newsletter and from the DRFA website.

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In-Person Meetings On Hold, Follow Website

Based on the still-high incidence of COVID-19 at the time this newsletter was being drafted, the Board of Directors has decided to suspend the in-person monthly meeting. If possible, we might try an open Zoom meeting for all members after discussions at a Board of Director's meeting. **Keep an eye on our website and your email inbox for updates.**

While the tentative 2021 tournament schedule has already been proposed (*see page 3*), there are still some open issues related to elections, meeting speakers, new-member incentives, etc. For example, we really need someone to fill the role of president to serve as a single point of contact for all Club activity.

Are You Ready For Some Fishing?!?!?

After a very disrupted 2020 season, the Club will hope for some better conditions to kick off the 2021 season with a bass tournament out of Curtin's Marina on Saturday, April 3. Only members who have paid their dues by the morning of the tournament are eligible to participate. Complete tournament information is available on the DRFA website.

If you're looking for some new places to fish, the New Jersey Department of Fish and Wildlife

has updated its link to its county-by-county table of fishing sites with boat ramp and car-top launch facilities at (<https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/fishplc.htm>). It also provides a link to the national **Places to Fish and Boat** locator (<https://www.takemefishing.org/where-to-fish-and-boat/#/bow/239770>). Take a glance through either of the resources to find a new hidden gem to try your luck. You might also consider Pennsylvania's Best Fishing Waters page to find a new change-of-pace fishing location (<https://www.fishandboat.com/Locate/BestFishingWaters/Pages/default.aspx>).

Important Dates

Wednesday, January 27, Monthly Meeting: No in-person meeting for January. We will look into possibilities for Zoom meetings.

Wednesday February 24, Monthly Meeting: TBD, based on COVID-19 conditions and Silver Lake Nature Center limitations.

Wednesday, March 31, Monthly Meeting: TBD, based on COVID-19 conditions and Silver Lake Nature Center limitations.

Saturday, April 3, 7 am, Bass Tournament: Curtin's Marina, Burlington, NJ.

AOTY: It's As Simple As 1...2...3 (4...5...6)

After multiple competitive finishes in recent Anger of the Year competitions, former Club president Scott McDonough captured his first title in 2020 on the basis of weighing a legal fish in all six tournaments.

The annual competition was nip-and-tuck throughout the year. All of the top four finishers averaged a top-five finish across the tournaments in which they weighed-in fish. But it was Scott's lowest finish – a 14th place finish (*second to last*) in the August catfish tournament – that made the difference in locking up the top spot with 579 points across six weigh-ins – an average of 96.5 points per weigh-in. By contrast, second-place finisher Gorge Hoffman's 484 points represented an average of 96.8 points per weigh-in, Mike Nucero's 482 points equaled 96.4 points per weigh-in, and Casey McDonough's 478 points was 95.6 points per weigh-in.

The River News caught up with Scott to review his experiences leading up to the 2020 title. We learned that he is not only knowledgeable, but also willing to share that information with fellow members. That reflects his own learning curve since joining the Club about 15 years ago to gain more experience and knowledge fishing the tidal river for largemouth bass. Part of Scott's approach is a numbers game, looking for the most active fish and letting the size take care of itself as a byproduct of seeing more fish. He approaches each tournament with a series of known spots to attack in the stretch of river within running distance from the launch ramp. That way, if one spot is not quickly productive, he is able to

hit multiple more spots in short order to find active fish on his preferred types of structure. Like other AOTY winners in recent years, he relies on experience accumulated from 'fun fishing' and pre-fishing a week before the next tournament (*two weeks on the tidal river to practice at the same tide level*).

When it comes to fishing largemouth bass in the tidal river, he targets a mix of hard and soft structures. That includes weed-line edges in about 5' of water that are adjacent to a deeper water drop-off (*i.e. 10' to 12'*). For example, he suggests looking for eel grass edges in areas where the channel buoys are closer to shore (*indicating a sharper drop-off*). He also looks for hard structure such as walls, pilings, or pipes protruding into the river, anything offering some sort of current break. His mental database includes both high-tide and low-tide structures, especially those that have a very attractive specific structure within the broader area – a 'spot on a spot' as he calls it.

Scott is very much in tune with the phase of the tide, looking for the short window of the outgoing tide where fish are most active. At that point in the tide, he says he won't spend more than 15-minutes in a given spot before running to the next nearest location on his milk run.

During catfish tournaments, he fishes mid-depth water (*perhaps a hole or depression in an area with predominantly 10' to 12' depth*). Here again, he looks for hard structures and indentations, closer toward shore. If fish are not active, he will move on to the next spot on his list.

When fishing the non-tidal river for smallmouth, he covers long stretches of shoreline in areas where he has had past success,

instead of just sitting on one previous hotspot for a long time. After covering more water, he'll revisit the most active spots.

Scott's keyword for AOTY success is 'consistency.' He concentrates first on getting a legal fish to weigh in each and every tournament, instead of just focusing on a big-fish spot from a previous trip – especially if water levels are not favorable for that top spot. He recommends not getting discouraged by a tough tournament day, as long as you cover enough water to add to your overall experience. It will eventually pay dividends.

In addition to his targeted spots, he also ensures that he has a variety of baits tied on for each fishing trip, to accommodate different spots and circumstances. In the tidal river that includes a soft plastic like a Texas-rigged 5-inch Senko or worm for weeds or a Ned Rig for hard structure; a spinnerbait; a crankbait; and a topwater bait, usually a popper. For smallmouth he'll include a tube and a superfluke

New Striped Bass Rule

According to new NJ regulations effective January 1, 2021, non-offset (*inline*) circle hooks must be used when fishing for striped bass with cut or whole natural bait in all waters. Under PA regulations, the use of a non-offset (*inline*) circle hook is required when fishing with bait for ANY species of fish in the tidal Delaware Estuary.

Also remember that Pennsylvania and NJ have different seasons, so if you are fishing from shore, or returning to a ramp, or driving through NJ, be aware that you will be subject to their closed season regulations. And don't forget to register or renew your Saltwater Registry information.

**From A to Z:
What Are Your Fishing
Plans For 2021?**

I don't know about everyone else, but after a year of spotty fishing opportunities and reduced social contact, I'm ready to make up for lost time with a renewed effort to fish more days, in more places, and with more people than I have for a long time.

Back in my fishing heyday – circa 2000 to 2010 – when I had more flexibility in my work schedule, I got to share insights with a wide variety of fishing partners thanks to connections made through a river smallies fishing group and a kayak-fishing club. In the best years, I learned from 25 or more different fishing partners, some of which were DRFA members.

For what it's worth, here is a cross-section of what I've learned over the years as a reward for going out of my way to fish with new individuals:

- Braid beats mono when fishing tubes or hair jigs in rocky waters.
- Complementing the use of braid with the buggy-whip technique saves a lot of lures.
- When fishing a soft jerkbait like a Case SSM/SSS in current, using fluorocarbon line instead of braid or mono will enable the bait to sink faster and get down deeper in the water column. Also, try feeding out a little extra line at the end of the J-turn to let the bait sink even further yet.
- Ned Rigs catch fish. *(That was a corollary to 'spider jigs catch fish', learned about 10 years earlier.)*
- When fishing a suspending jerkbait in cold water, after

cranking the bait down to its depth, let the bait sit still in the current until you absolutely can't stand it any more...and then let it sit a little longer before giving it a slight twitch. The fish will tell you how aggressive a presentation they will accept.

- Topwater lures are not just for summer mornings or evenings; they can be used from April to October.
- It's easier to remove a treble hook embedded in your calf by using a loop of line instead of a pair of pliers.

This year, I'd like to get back to that practice of fishing with new partners. If you'd like to learn more about some of the

techniques mentioned above – or have some better ones to pass along – perhaps this is the year we can get together to share them. Give me a call or talk to me at a future Club event.

Also, if your regular tournament partner is not available to fish a particular tournament, consider offering the open seat to another DRFA angler. You might be surprised at what you can learn, or pass along to an appreciative member.

Treasurer's Report

The treasury balance reported as of December 28, 2020 was \$9,014.56. The balance as of January 17 was \$9,039.56.

Tentative 2021 Tournament Schedule

(subject to permit approvals)

All DRFA Club tournaments are free and open to dues-paying DRFA members only. (There are no club fees; however, ramp, launch, and/or parking fees may apply. There will be a voluntary \$10.00 pool with a 100% payout to pool participants for the three heaviest pool fish {60%, 30% and 10%} at tournament's end.) Members accrue points for the Angler of the Year competition based on their top six finishes among the nine regular club events. Except for the Shad Tournament, new members may register on the morning of an event, before check-in time. Weigh-in is at the time specified. Late entries will not count.

Always check the DRFA website or the Tournament Hotline (267-934-2148) the night before the event to learn about any possible rescheduling or relocation due to water or weather conditions.

Date	Event	Time	Location
Sat, 4/3	Bass	7 am	Curtin's Marina, Burlington, NJ
Sat, 4/24	Shad	2 pm	Weigh in at Yardley Park & Ride
Sun, 5/16	Catfish	6 am	Neshaminy State Marina, Croydon, PA
Sun, 6/13	Bass	6 am	Gloucester City Marina, NJ
Sat, 7/10	Catfish	6 am,	Gloucester City Marina, NJ
Sun, 8/8	Catfish	6 am	Neshaminy State Marina, Croydon, PA
Sun, 8/29	Bass	6 am	Neshaminy State Marina, Croydon, PA
Sat 9/25	Bass	7 am	Byram Access Ramp, Byram, NJ
Sat, 10/30	Bass	7:30 am	Bulls Island State Park, Stockton, NJ
7/11 or 7/18	Youth Derby	8 am	PA Yacht Club, Bensalem, PA

The Delaware River Fishermen's Association
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JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2021 ISSUE

- **LAST CHANCE FOR 2021 DUES**
- **CLUB MEETING UPDATES**
- **NEW TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE**
- **AOTY INSIGHTS**

Also visit our website
www.drfishermen.com

THE RIVER NEWS is the bimonthly newsletter of the Delaware River Fishermen's Association. The DRFA typically meets the last Wednesday of each month, 7:00 pm, at the Silver Lake Nature Center, 1306 Bath Road, Bristol, PA. All interested sportsmen and women are invited to attend and join the organization.

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